

HIV & AIDS INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Your right to know!



UNITE FOR CHILDREN
UNITE AGAINST AIDS

What's the big deal about HIV and AIDS?

It's easy to think that HIV and AIDS is something for other people like drug users and sex workers to worry about.

This is wrong. Everyone, from teens and young people, to adults, whoever you are, wherever you live, need to take the threat of HIV seriously. To be able to protect yourself, you need to know the facts, and know how to avoid becoming infected with HIV.

Isn't AIDS an adult's problem?¹

No. HIV is a big problem for young people, as well as adults.

Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 account for around 42% of all new HIV infections in 2010 .

Globally, young women aged 15-24, have HIV infection rates twice as high as in young men, and account for 22% of all new HIV infections.

Many adolescents living with HIV today were born with the virus.

Adolescents who sell sex or use drugs are at higher risk of HIV infection. They also may not have access to information, sterile injecting equipment and services such as HIV testing and support.

HIV+ AIDS Key Statistics: 2010

- People living with HIV: **34 million**
- People died of AIDS: **30 million**
- New infections per day: **7,000**

Source: UNAIDS AIDS at 30 Report 2011

What's the difference between HIV and AIDS?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that damages the body's immune system. Our immune system defends us against any illnesses. This means that people who have HIV can get really sick when a healthy person would normally fight it off quite easily.

HIV causes **AIDS** (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). AIDS is the late stage of HIV infection, when the immune system has been damaged to the point that people can no longer fight off any illnesses.

There is no way of getting rid of HIV once you have it in your body, as there is no cure yet. People infected with HIV ('HIV-positive' people) may look and feel healthy for many years. However, even when they are feeling well they can pass the virus on to others. New medicines can help HIV-positive people feel healthier and live longer.

¹ UNAIDS, World AIDS Day Report 2011 | UNICEF Opportunity in Crisis 2011

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How long does it take for HIV to cause AIDS?

The length of time between being infected with HIV and being diagnosed with AIDS depends on a lot of different things.

These days, there are many drugs that can be used to help people with HIV, and most doctors believe that a lot of people can be treated for a very long time. Many people do not know exactly when they were infected with HIV, so the length of time between this happening and them being diagnosed with AIDS can vary from person to person.

So how do you get infected with HIV?

HIV is passed on in the sexual fluids or blood of an HIV-infected person. If this infected blood or sexual fluids get into your body, then you are likely to be infected too. This usually happens by either having **unprotected sexual intercourse** with an infected person or by **sharing needles** with someone who is infected.

The virus can also be found in saliva, but in much smaller amounts — too small an amount, experts believe, to transmit the disease.

An infant can also become infected by being born to a mother who has HIV. Vertical transmission, where the disease is transmitted from mother to child, can take place during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding. Malaysia however provides free antiretroviral treatment for HIV-positive mothers to protect babies from being born with HIV.

Can I get HIV through social contact?

You cannot get the virus from breathing the same air as a person with HIV.

HIV is not transmitted by: hugging, shaking hands; casual, everyday contact; using swimming pools, toilet seats; sharing bed linens, eating utensils, food; mosquito and other insect bites; coughing or sneezing.

Body fluid containing HIV must be able to pass into another person's body through a break in the tissue/skin to cause an infection.

Sex

The most common way of spreading the infection by exchanging bodily fluids is through unprotected penetrative sexual intercourse. 'Unprotected' means sex without a condom.

Being infected with other sexually transmitted infections (STI) makes HIV transmission more likely because STIs can damage the tissue/skin of the sexual organs. This makes it easier for infected blood to enter the bloodstream. If you suspect you may have an STI, you should see a health professional as STIs can also cause other serious health problems.

Girls and women are at least twice as likely to contract HIV through vaginal sex with infected males than vice versa. This biological vulnerability is worsened by the fact that women may find it harder to avoid sex with an infected person or insist on condom use due to social and cultural expectations.



How can I protect myself from HIV?

Abstinence

The only way to be 100 per cent sure you do not become infected with HIV through sexual contact is **abstinence**: in other words, simply not having vaginal, anal or oral sex. In addition to protecting you from HIV, abstinence is also the only 100 per cent safeguard against contracting STIs. And not having sex is the only completely foolproof method of preventing pregnancy as well.

Being faithful

Being faithful to your sexual partner helps protect the both of you. If you and your partner only have sex with each other, and neither of you is HIV-positive, there is no risk at all that either of you will be infected. However, to establish that neither of you are infected with HIV, you will both have to have an HIV test. Being faithful is no protection if one of you already has HIV from a previous relationship. Even if your partner did not get infected in a previous relationship, remember that there are various ways of getting infected and that someone who is HIV-positive may not look ill.

Condoms

When you do have penetrative sex, always use latex condoms. Using condoms properly, is a very effective method of contraception and protection from infections. However, because condoms occasionally break or slip off, they are not 100 per cent safe.

What about using drugs?

The only way to be safe around drugs is not to take them. If you are on drugs you may take risks you normally wouldn't take, and you may have unsafe sex when you would normally be more careful.

When on drugs, you might find it more difficult to use a condom, or you might forget altogether. One of the most common drugs this can happen with is alcohol – if you're drunk, you might not always know what you're doing, or you might not care. If you are injecting drugs, you should always use a clean syringe each time you inject, and never share any of these syringes with anyone else.

How about tattooing and body piercings?

If you want to have a tattoo or piercing, make sure the tattooist or piercer explains all their safety measures first. The tattooist or piercer should wear gloves, use a new, sterilised needle, and then discard that needle after he/she has used it.

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Can I get infected the first time?

Yes. If your partner has HIV and you have unsafe sex or share a needle or syringe, then you can become infected the first time, and any other time thereafter.

Is there a cure?

There is still no cure for AIDS. And while new drugs are helping some people who have HIV live longer, healthier lives, there are still many problems associated with them.

Anti-HIV drugs are highly toxic and can cause serious side effects, including heart damage, kidney failure, and osteoporosis. Many (perhaps even most) patients cannot tolerate long-term treatment with HAART (Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy), a combination treatment with 3-4 antiviral medications.

How can I tell if someone's HIV+?

You cannot tell just by looking at someone whether they are infected with HIV. Someone can be infected but have no symptoms and still look perfectly healthy. They themselves might not know that they are HIV-positive because they look perfectly healthy. The only way to know if a person is infected or not is if they have a blood test.

How can I get tested?

If you think you might have been exposed to HIV, you should get tested immediately.

Knowing your HIV status early will make it easier for you to make decisions and take steps to protect your long-term health.

Taking an active approach to managing HIV may give you many more years of healthy life than if you waited and did nothing.

If you are HIV positive, you will also be conscious in taking measures to protect others from becoming infected.

IMPORTANT: It is important to receive both pre- and post test counseling when you go for your test. You can contact any of the NGOs listed for further advice.

WHERE TO GO?

GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS AND CLINICS
Hospital Sungei Buloh

NGOS

You can also contact any of the following NGOs for advice and counseling. Some also provide anonymous testing. (See NGOs with *)

NATIONWIDE

- Federation of Reproductive Health Associations
(03) 5633 7514 (available at all states)

KLANG VALLEY

- Malaysian AIDS Council
(03) 4045 1033
- Federation of Reproductive Health Associations
(03) 4045 1033
(Services are available at every state)
- Kuala Lumpur AIDS Support Services Society
(03) 6253 1684
- PT Foundation*
(03) 4044 5455 or (03) 4044 5466
Mon-Fri, 7:30pm – 9:30pm

PENANG

- Community AIDS Service Penang*
(04) 656 1554

SARAWAK

- Sarawak AIDS Concern Society
(082) 252 300

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I have HIV. What should I do?

If you have found that you have HIV, you will need to tell the people who you have had sex with and anyone you have shared needles with so that they can decide if they want to have a test. This can be a very difficult thing to tell someone. If you think you can't tell them, your doctor or nurse may be able to help you. Your doctor at the clinic should also be able to give you more advice about how to stay healthy. They will also be able to tell you if you need to have any other blood tests done, and talk to you about medication.

How can I help a HIV-positive friend?

When someone you know is HIV-positive, you may feel helpless. You may be afraid of intruding on your friend's privacy or simply not know what to say or do. Here are some tips on how you can help.

If you know that someone in your group has HIV or AIDS, it is important to make sure that friends who are already aware of his or her condition know that it is safe to touch, hug, share food and be together socially. At the same time, confidentiality should be respected. It is important to show that your regard for this person has not changed, and that you can continue to share friendship or joint activities in the same way as before.

If your friend is sick, he or she will certainly need other forms of support, such as help with cooking, shopping, taking medicines, going out, cleaning or simply talking about his or her feelings.

How can I play my part?

Everyone has a role to play to stop the spread of HIV. Here are just a few suggestions on how you can make a difference:

- get tested for HIV
- avoid high risk behaviours, e.g using drugs
- practice safer behaviours to prevent HIV
- spread the word about HIV prevention with family and friends – tell them the facts
- speak out against stigma and discrimination against HIV-positive people
- provide support to people living with HIV and AIDS
- organise an event for World AIDS Day in your community!

Stigma and Discrimination

People with HIV are part of society. They can continue their lives, do their jobs as well as they could before they were infected. They look and feel perfectly healthy for a long time. People with HIV should be treated just like anyone else.

Disrespecting or denying the human rights of people living with HIV and AIDS can lead to stigma and discrimination. This can cause unnecessary personal suffering and loss of dignity for the HIV-positive person. It can also contribute indirectly to the spread of HIV since it prevents an effective response.

This flyer was compiled and edited by UNICEF Malaysia youth volunteer, Ineza Rousille (22) in 2009.